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### Kentucky politics : where are all the women?

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## **Kentucky politics: Where are all the women?**

Carrie Mattingly

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This paper seeks to uncover the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in politics, with a geographical emphasis on the state of Kentucky. The research question explored is, “Why do so few women run for political office?” Surveys of women currently enrolled in college and phone interviews with women serving in the Kentucky state legislature are used to investigate this question by testing two hypotheses. First, the tendency of women to avoid running for office in the first place may be attributed to either weak recruitment of women or lack of political ambition among women. Second, a female tendency to lack political ambition exists partly because women display higher aversion to politics than men. Both survey and interview data from the study support my first hypothesis that weak recruitment and lack of ambition play a role in keeping women off the ballot. Survey data also support my second hypothesis that diminished ambition results from high female aversion to politics; however, qualitative interview data are inconclusive due to the inability of the question set to measure the concept of aversion.

## **Kentucky politics: Where are all the women?**

### **Introduction**

In this paper, I study the topic of women in politics. More specifically, I seek to uncover the reasons for the severe underrepresentation of women in politics across states and at all levels of government. This study is important for a number of reasons. First, women have been underrepresented in politics since our country's beginnings, and civil rights movements, including those in favor of feminism and women's suffrage, have for centuries failed to close the gap between the numbers of men and women making public policy decisions in the U.S. The issue has spanned generations and shows only minimal signs of positive change over time. Second, women make up over half the U.S. population, yet they hold far less than that percentage of political offices; therefore, representativeness is a severe problem. Third, recently women in political leadership have received attention for their great ability to compromise and to put the "greater good" ahead of their personal egos. I heard this testament from women while doing my research, and it is certainly a reason to figure out why so few women hold those leadership roles.

The Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) at Rutgers University tracks women's political participation in aggregate and by state from 1970 to 2012. Using the secondary data provided by the center's website, I examine the election results of races over time that involved female candidates for offices at the state district, statewide, and congressional levels. I focus on the state of Kentucky and its situation between states that display the highest and lowest rates of female political representation. State-specific data is important, as state political culture varies greatly among states. As I will show, some states are more conducive to

electing women into political office than others. Kentucky, in contrast, has yet to embrace female political participation in the forms of candidacy and office holding to the extent of other states.

According to the CAWP, women who run for office succeed at about the same rate as their male counterparts. *Perception and Reality*, a 1994 study conducted by the National Women's Political Caucus, proved that a candidate's sex did not affect his or her chance of victory in a general election by studying female candidates running for state legislatures, governorships, and U.S. congressional offices from 1986 to 1992 (Newman 1994). If women are underrepresented, then it must be for reasons other than electoral failure. Furthermore, it is well documented that women are severely underrepresented in government at all levels in the United States. In 2012, women composed only 16.8% of the U.S. House of Representatives with 73 of 435 seats and 17% of the U.S. Senate with 17 of 100 seats. In statewide offices, such as governor, attorney general, and secretary of state, women hold about 23% of positions nationwide. Women are similarly underrepresented in state legislative offices, where they hold about 24% of positions nationwide (CAWP). As positions approach locality, women are slightly better represented than they are at the federal congressional level. However, women compose over half of the U.S. population, so none of these numbers come close to representativeness.

In 1996, 179 women ran for Congress and statewide offices across the United States. Of the 179, 77 women, or 43%, were victorious. Eight years later in 2004, 189 women ran for the same offices, and 89 women, or 47%, were victorious. More recently in 2012, 232 women pursued those offices, showing a significant jump in the number of female candidates; 118 of those women, or 51%, achieved victory. National aggregate data on female candidates for congressional and statewide offices, therefore, shows a gradual increase in candidacy and victory rates from 1996 to 2012 (CAWP).

In state legislative offices, women have not experienced as consistent of an increase in candidacy and victory rates. In 1992, 2,315 women ran for state legislative office, and 1,350 women, or 58%, won. Ten years later in 2002, 2,337 women ran for those state-level offices, and 1,438 women, or 62%, won. More recently in 2012, 2,573 women ran for those offices, and 1,500 women, or 58%, won. Therefore, women do well nationally as candidates for state legislative office. How well represented they are, however, has much to do with individual states once the data are separated. The states of Colorado, Vermont, Hawaii, Arizona, and Minnesota round out the top five states with regard to female representation in state legislatures in 2012. Colorado takes the top spot with women composing 40% of its state legislative seats. This number contrasts sharply with percentages in South Carolina, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Alabama, and North Dakota, the five lowest ranked states with regard to female representation in 2012 state legislatures. South Carolina takes the bottom spot with women holding only 10% of its legislative offices (CAWP).

The state of Kentucky, my home state that I will emphasize in my thesis, is situated between these two extremes. However, it leans far closer to South Carolina than to Colorado on the spectrum. In 2012, women held 18.8% of Kentucky state legislative offices, putting Kentucky at 38<sup>th</sup> in the ranking of female representation in political office at the state legislative level. It still holds true, however, that female candidates win at similar rates to men when they run. For example, 27 of 47, or 57%, of female candidates in Colorado won in 1994. In Kentucky that year, 11 of 18, or 61%, of female candidates won. Even these victory rates are small compared to the victory rate of female candidates for the South Carolina legislature in 1994, when 18 of 24, or 75%, of the women won. Therefore, women are proven electoral victors at the state level, even in states where men drastically outnumber them in politics. In 2004, 59% of

women running in Colorado achieved victory, along with 62% of women running in Kentucky and 65% of women running in South Carolina. Therefore, the victory rates of women running for positions in state legislatures have been fairly high and stable in recent times.

The sizable differences among states with regard to the representation of women in public office can be explained by state political culture. Daniel Elazar first developed the idea of state political culture in his book *American Federalism: A View from the States* published in 1966. According to Elazar, political culture explained how state polities functioned: the value systems of original settlers influenced the culture in individual regions, which later became states. Political culture can tell us much about state government characteristics, but most importantly for my research, it sets the boundaries for who can participate in politics and to what extent public participation is encouraged (Leckrone 2013). To test Elazar's theory, I compare individual states' political cultures to how much women participate in those state legislatures.

Elazar separated states into three subcultures: moralistic, individualistic, and traditionalistic. The individualistic subculture emphasizes private interests at the expense of the public good and assumes that individuals use the political system for their own causes. The moralistic culture, in contrast, supports collective action and believes that public participation in politics and the public good are important ends of government. Finally, the traditionalistic culture seeks to maintain the status quo and benefit those who are already powerful and wealthy. Colorado, the state that best represents women in the state legislature, is categorized in the moralistic culture, which is to be expected since that state culture values wide participation by diverse groups of citizens. South Carolina, the state with the least women serving in the legislature, falls into the traditionalistic category, which also aligns with the state's underrepresentation of women given the culture's closed-off, elitist mindset. Kentucky, my state

of emphasis, is also included in the traditionalistic category (Leckrone 2013). Elazar's theory appears to hold water in these states.

Elazar's concept of state political culture, however, is not entirely inclusive. As Reingold (2000) points out, ideological climate is an important component of political culture that is not addressed by Elazar's model. In Kentucky's case, conservatism dominates. Since 1976, Kentucky's electoral votes for president have gone to Democrats only three times, once to Jimmy Carter and twice to Bill Clinton (Kentucky Voting History 2014). These exceptions are predictable, since both presidents were from the South. Women's policy interests, including reproductive rights, access to childcare, and the feminization of poverty, typically coincide with more liberal political agendas. Women wishing to enact change on these issues would likely find more support in a liberal state than in a conservative one like Kentucky (Reingold 2000). My home state is worth studying because of its poor performance in female political representation and its political culture of traditionalism and conservatism. My research, therefore, involves only Kentucky women.

In order to increase the representation of women in politics, the goal must be to increase the number of female candidates who run for office, as the data clearly show that women who run succeed. The central question I seek to answer through my research is, "Why do so few women run for political office?" I utilize surveys of college women in Kentucky and interviews with women serving in the Kentucky General Assembly to answer this question. The literature contains many theories for why women do not run for office as often as men, but my research is needed to discover which of those theories are valid in Kentucky, a state displaying very few female politicians holding office compared to other states.

## **Literature Review**

An extensive body of literature already exists that attempts to explain the relative absence of women in political office compared to men. I have summarized this literature by separating it into seven main factors that have been studied as possible reasons for the unequal representation of women in politics: private forms of participation, state culture, recruitment, gender issues, voters, media coverage, and ambition. According to the literature, women's private participation in politics, state political culture of gender inequity, diminished recruitment of women candidates, gender stereotypes and inequities, sexist media coverage of candidates and female politicians, and lower political ambition in women may serve as reasons for the underrepresentation of women in politics. Research on voter behavior, however, fails to conclude that women are disadvantaged because of sexist voters.

### **Private Forms of Political Participation**

Some studies suggest that women are less likely to run for public office because they participate politically through different means. For example, women are far more likely than men to participate in politics privately but far less likely to join a political party and run for office. Private means of participation include signing petitions, boycotting products, voting, and contributing money to a campaign (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010). Rather than limiting political ambition to candidacy, this line of research seeks to expand the literature on female underrepresentation by examining alternative forms of participation in politics.

Theorists who consider these private forms of participation draw upon the female tendency to participate in political activities outside of running for office. According to Coffé and Bolzendahl (2010), studies of gender differences in political participation that are limited to campaigns for office do not tell the whole story. Voting, for example, may be an equally



important means of political participation, and women consistently vote in higher numbers than men. This research, however, does not account for circumstantial differences between men and women that affect willingness to participate more publicly in politics. For example, childbearing is a circumstance that significantly decreases a woman's tendency to run for public office, because the electoral process and childrearing compete for her scarce resource of time (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010). This private participation hypothesis is weak in that it still does not address the underlying issue of women's underrepresentation in public office. It ignores financial and personal factors, like income and family, which directly affect a woman's decision of how to get politically involved given other life circumstances. These private, alternative forms of political participation are notable for women, but they do not resolve the fundamental issue of underrepresentation.

#### State Political Culture

Rule (1981) studies the recruitment process for political candidates using state-level data. First, states that did not pass women's suffrage until the late 1910s recruit fewer women for political office today than do other states. This trend makes sense if a gender culture of reduced political opportunity for women dominates in a state. Second, states with fewer women professionals also have fewer women politicians. This trend is also to be expected given the close association between professional employment and political involvement. These state-level contextual factors matter, because states that have emphasized expanded women's opportunities in the voting booth and the workplace tend to exhibit more egalitarian political opportunities for women today than those that have not (Rule 1981).

## Recruitment

Multiple studies have shown that women who decide to run for office in a state legislature or the U.S. Congress are not, at that point, disadvantaged compared to men running for the same offices. The gender gap that exists in these offices, therefore, must be explained by early factors in the candidate recruitment process (Rule 1981). According to Fox and Lawless (2010), highly qualified and politically connected women are still far less likely to be recruited to run for office than their male counterparts. They are less likely to be recruited intensely, and they are less likely to be recruited by more than one person. Successful candidates for public office must rely heavily upon political institutions for support, but those institutions are largely patriarchal. Patriarchy exists within all three branches of government, as is evidenced by the difficulty female officials face interjecting feminine issues into domestic policy and committee meeting agendas and undertaking leadership roles (Fox and Lawless 2010). Given the uphill battle women face seeking support for their candidacy, it is not surprising that so few women actually file to run for office.

Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes (2003) depict female political opportunities in a slightly more positive light. Women face far fewer obstacles in running for office than they did in the late twentieth century. For example, campaign organization and fundraising ability are less likely to be determined by the gender of a candidate today. Women are also, however, avoiding races that are perceivably impossible for them to win. Despite these indicators of expanding opportunity for women interested in politics, fewer women are recruited to run for office than men; it is likely, however, that women who do run face far fewer obstacles today than they did in decades past (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003).

## Gender Issues

A discussion of gender is also important in any analysis of the underrepresentation of women in political office. Stereotyping and other gender inequities have been cited as reasons for the lack of women in politics. Women's relative political and occupational inexperience may serve as gatekeepers blocking them from candidacy in the political process. However, these disadvantages should wane as women become more experienced over time. Gender issues are illuminating in attempting to explain why disadvantages have not been adequately reduced (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003).

Women are stereotyped both generally and as politicians. Gender stereotypes, good or bad, certainly influence voters. Studies reveal that American voters view women as more liberal than men on a variety of issues. On a psychological level, women are assumed to be more compassionate and emotional than men. Such stereotypes give voters ideas as to the policy preferences and potential effectiveness of female candidates. Further context is needed to show how these gender stereotypes affect women's political fortunes. For instance, an election involving hot button family issues benefits women candidates, but one emphasizing national security and cracking down on crime benefits men (Iyengar et al. 1997).

A positive side of gender stereotyping shows that female political candidates excel when they utilize their gender as an asset rather than as a liability. Rather than allowing the "female sex" to serve as a voter deterrent, women in politics are statistically more successful when they stress women's issues and target female voters. Men and women sometimes agree on issues such as abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment; however, women are more unified in setting themselves apart from men on other gender-charged issues. For instance, women are less likely to support war and more likely to support compassionate welfare than men. Women in politics

who can effectively promote these issues are likely to achieve electoral success (Herrnson, Lay, and Stokes 2003). It is generally accepted by theorists that women who campaign on women's issues enjoy significant political advantage over those who do not (Iyengar et al. 1997).

Despite positive political indicators for women who raise women's issues, gender itself remains an obstacle for many politically interested women. Familial responsibilities, especially childcare, are still disproportionately imposed upon women, making it difficult for women to sustain a political career. Men are also more self-motivated than women, so family circumstances play a larger role in determining political careers for women than for men (Bledsoe and Herring 1990). Employment is positively related to political participation, and men are still far more likely than women to be employed full-time even today in the United States (Coffé and Bolzendahl 2010). Furthermore, the incumbency advantage in American electoral politics works against potential women candidates. Current supermajorities of men in most political entities make the integration of disadvantaged and underrepresented groups increasingly unlikely in the near political future (Fox and Lawless 2004). Assumptions associated with gender stereotypes, along with continuing inequity surrounding gender in family life and employment, have been shown to hurt female candidates in their pursuit of public office.

### Voters

Does candidate sex matter to voters? History would indicate yes but only in some years. Dolan (2004) finds that the sex of candidates running for the House of Representatives mattered to voters in 1992 but not in 1994 or 1996. Stereotypes obviously affect voter behavior, but there may be other reasons why people vote for female candidates. Although political party is by far the strongest indicator of vote choice, there is also research suggesting that voters sometimes seek out candidates with certain characteristics, one being sex. Descriptive representation is

exercised when voters choose candidates based upon their resemblance to them; alternatively, voters choosing candidates who will perform specific actions on their behalf display a preference for substantive representation. Descriptive representation, for example, occurs when voters choose female candidates based upon a desire to increase the representation of women. Other voters, however, vote for women because they want them to pursue certain policies while in office. Evidence suggests that descriptive representation matters more to female voters, who choose to vote for women more often than men partly because of shared identity. Substantive representation is also a commonly held desire of those voters who prioritize “women’s issues” and expect women to do a better job of addressing them in office than men (Dolan 2004, 10-13).

The question then arises of whether there is an identifiable “women’s interest” held by all female voters. Many voters stereotypically assume that female candidates are feminist and philosophically liberal. If more conservative or traditional women take such assumptions as fact, it is highly unlikely that they would share the views of female candidates simply because they have gender in common. Therefore, descriptive representation does not always equal substantive representation, and women do not constitute a guaranteed voting block for women seeking political office (Dolan 2004, 13-17).

Perhaps women are underrepresented in politics because of biased voters who discriminate against female candidates. Cook (1998) sought to evaluate this possibility using three tools: polling data to find out if voters voiced bias against women, controlled experiments using candidates who differ in sex, and actual vote numbers of women who ran for office. Polling data reveals that only a small minority of Americans is willing to voice prejudice against women. As of the early 1990s, only 7% of polled Americans said that they would not vote for a woman for president. The same survey revealed that well over 80% of respondents disagreed that

women should oversee the home and leave managing of the country to men. Respondents were less unified on the question of whether or not more women needed to be elected to office, with female voters more likely to answer in the affirmative. Research is conclusive, however, in showing that voters are highly unlikely to vote based upon a candidate's sex even when they agree that more women are needed in office (Cook 1998).

Although voters are not explicitly sexist, women may still be disadvantaged. Cook's experiments revealed that many voters assigned female candidates "feminine" traits regardless of whether candidates characterized themselves as masculine or feminine. Male voters in particular devalue feminine traits, likely causing many to avoid voting for women candidates. Voters, therefore, evaluate female candidates differently by assigning them feminine traits whether or not they are displayed. Early female politicians such as vice-presidential nominee Geraldine Ferraro and California gubernatorial candidate Dianne Feinstein saw a need to emphasize their "toughness" as candidates to appeal to male voters (Cook 1998).

Finally, female candidates have become more successful over time with respect to actual votes cast at the ballot box. First, both Republican and Democratic women running for governor can expect to receive slightly more votes from women than from men. Second, Republican women running for Senate receive more support from men than from women. Women, in these cases, were more likely to vote for the Democratic male candidate. Third, House races revealed that women were far more likely than men to support Democratic candidates. This gap was largest when a Democratic woman was running and smallest when the woman was a Republican. Furthermore, voters were more heavily influenced by sexism when Democratic women were running. Both men and women who characterize themselves as feminists support Democratic women regardless of their personal party affiliation. When Republican women are running, they

attract more women than men from partisan groups that ordinarily would not support them (Cook 1998). For example, Republican women are more likely to receive votes from Democratic women than they are from Democratic men.

From her research, Cook (1998) derives five main conclusions. First, partisanship proved more important than the sex of the voter in predicting votes to be cast for female candidates. Second, Republican women attract more votes from men than women when they run for Senate. However, they attract more votes from women when they run for governor or the House. Many explanations could account for this difference, including the fact that Senate races may elicit raw ideological beliefs in voters instead of concern for their home state or district. Third, the gender gap between men and women voters is larger when Democratic women run against Republican men than when both candidates are men. Fourth, gender gaps are larger in elections in which gender beliefs and identities are reported on and emphasized. Fifth, gender gaps vary a great deal across states (Cook 1998). It is clear, therefore, that candidate sex matters to at least some voters. However, sexist voters cannot be blamed for the relative absence of women in politics.

### Media Coverage of Women Candidates

Political scientists who focus on women have hypothesized that the media's treatment of women in politics may have an effect upon their success or failure. Kahn (2003) points out that women are first underrepresented in the presentation of news. Women are rarely used as news sources, comprising only 15% of sources in one study, and findings are similar with regard to national newspapers, which look to men for comment on stories 85% of the time. Magazine covers such as *Time* present an even more dismal outlook, with only 12 women featured as political leaders, government officials, or activists between 1928 and 1985. Instead, most covers featured women in the entertainment industry. To update Kahn's research, I examined more

recent covers of *Time* and found that between 1992 and 2012, 125 women were featured on *Time* covers in total. Of those 125 women, only 36 were featured as political leaders or activists. Though the depictions of women as leaders increased since the 1920s and 1980s, most of the women featured were once again models, actresses, or mothers. This severe underrepresentation of women in the media as knowledgeable informants may lead to public belief that women are not legitimate sources of political news (Kahn 2003).

In addition, women are underrepresented in the entertainment industry. Women are far less likely to be featured on prime time television, but women who are featured are often portrayed as wives or parents rather than as high status leaders or career people outside of the home. Such entertainment underrepresentation affects the political realm through socialization. Young people, for example, spend 20 or more hours per week watching television shows with men playing authority figures and women filling roles that are subordinate to men. It is likely that those young people internalize such differences and inadvertently continue them. The socialization process, therefore, may be a contributing factor to the lack of political ambition and interest in women (Kahn 2003).

When women do decide to run for office, the media differentiates them from men as candidates. Content analyses in the mid-1980s revealed that female candidates received less campaign coverage in newspapers than male candidates, and the coverage women did receive was more likely to be negative and pessimistic about their chances of victory. In addition, the media differed in its messaging treatment of men and women candidates. While news media accurately presented messages disseminated by male candidates, female candidate messages were more often distorted in a way that led to less favorable public response. More recent studies allude to the fact that media treatment of female candidates has improved over time but not to the



level of equal treatment. When interviewed, campaign managers for female candidates were more likely to accuse the media of bias in its treatment of their candidates. They also identified media bias in reporting, as their candidates were scrutinized for things like clothes and hairstyle that never arise with male candidates (Kahn 2003).

Furthermore, women may be deterred from running for office because of the media's treatment of women after they are elected. Research on this possibility is scarce, but Carroll and Schreiber (2003) addressed the disparity by analyzing media treatment of women serving in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the early 1990s. Women in politics argue that the media discriminates by treating them less seriously than their male counterparts and focusing on irrelevant distractions such as appearance and family life. To determine the validity of the women's assessment of media treatment, Carroll and Schreiber (2003) looked at nearly 300 articles published in major national newspapers that referred to women in the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress.

First, they found that about 10% of the articles were published in style sections of newspapers, lending credibility to the critique that major newspapers sometimes place stories about female politicians in "feminine" sections of the paper, thus diminishing the role those women play in policymaking. Second, they found that 15% of the papers mentioned the exclusion encountered by women within political institutions, showing that at least some newspapers emphasized the negative when writing on female politicians. Third, over a quarter of the articles mentioned women working together on legislation regarding abortion or women's health. The articles that mentioned the congresswomen rarely discussed the women's role in shaping policy on nongendered issues like crime, NAFTA, and campaign finance reform. Carroll and Schreiber conclude that some but not all complaints of female politicians regarding media bias are legitimized by their research. The real problem, they argue, is omission of articles

referencing female politicians working on anything besides feminine issues (Carroll and Schreiber 2003). Kahn's research on the media's treatment of female candidates is more conclusive in showing that women who run for office do in fact suffer from biased media treatment. It is likely, therefore, that the media contributes in some capacity to the lack of women in politics.

### Political Ambition

The literature has pointed to private forms of political participation, the candidate recruitment process, harmful gender stereotypes and inequities, and biased media coverage as potential reasons for the underrepresentation of women in politics. None of these factors, however, seem to tell the whole story. More recently, researchers have begun to investigate political ambition in women. The theory of reduced political ambition states that women are only likely to run for office under certain conditions that matter little to men and that political success for women compared to men is more closely linked to personal circumstances. These two differences combined lead to decreased political ambition in women. Electoral politics presents one of only a few arenas in which men and women openly compete against one another, making a woman's decision to run for office unique. Research suggests that a woman's political ambition is strengthened when she has already held a political position. Since so few women have experience in politics, ambition to reach for higher positions is limited. Ambition is also heavily influenced by perceptions of vulnerability, which are common in politically interested women (Bledsoe and Herring 1990).

Another factor stifling political ambition for women involves lack of encouragement. Prospective female candidates are far less likely than their male counterparts to be encouraged to run for office by a current elected or party official. Surveys collecting information on political

ambition in relation to socio-demographic factors reveal that gender influences women's political ambition in a negative direction, meaning that women tend to be less politically ambitious than men. However, the same research also indicates that both men and women respond similarly to political windows of opportunity including open seats, expiring term limits, and partisan favorability (Fox and Lawless 2004). If a general lack of political ambition exists in women, then this theory may help explain why earlier studies have failed to fully explain the political underrepresentation of women. For this reason, I focus on this question of women's political ambition in my data collection.

### Summary and Missing Information

In synthesizing an extensive body of research, I recognize that once locked in as viable candidates, women in politics are making strides. However, they have yet to overcome tremendous obstacles in attraction and recruitment to candidacy. Furthermore, I was not satisfied with the level of specificity included in explanations for reduced political ambition in women. It does not seem plausible, for example, that lack of political experience and feelings of vulnerability alone could account for generally diminished political ambition in one gender. In my thesis, I would like to discover more concrete answers to why so few women run and succeed in politics generally, while emphasizing the state of Kentucky as a specific case. Since Kentucky-centered research on this topic is absent or difficult to find, I decided to conduct research on my own to uncover results specific to my home state, which ranks in the lowest quartile of all U.S. states in the number of women elected to its state legislature. Kentucky has elected only one female governor and two female U.S. representatives in its history; in addition, the state has never elected a woman to the U.S. Senate.

## **Hypotheses and Questions**

Previous research shows that women are less politically engaged than men, and this engagement gap is created early in life, prior to any possible consideration of candidacy for political office. According to Jennings and Niemi (1971), the nuclear family plays an influential role in shaping the political attitudes of offspring in early years. Their study refers to the division of labor in a marriage that conditions adult political behavior and socializes children. Although this study is dated, its implications for the early socialization of children with regard to political attitudes are still valid. As men are more likely to serve as the political interpreters in a family, women in as early as childhood internalize that message and may imitate the political indifference of their mothers later in life (Jennings and Niemi 1971). Further evidence from the American National Election Survey displays higher aversion to politics among women than men. When presented with the statement, “Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on,” 72% of female respondents in 2008 selected “agree,” compared to only 63% of male respondents. When asked to respond to the question, “Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, some of the time, only now and then, or hardly at all?” only 20% of female respondents in 2008 selected “most of the time,” compared to 33% of male respondents (ANES Guide to Public Opinion and Electoral Behavior). These data indicate that women do not feel as politically capable as men. Finally, Bledsoe and Herring (1990) identified aversion to competition among women, and the political process would certainly qualify as a form of competition.

I created my central research question and hypotheses using this previous literature and data. My research question is, “Why do so few women make the decision to run for office?” I

test two hypotheses in response to this question. First, the tendency of women to avoid running for office in the first place may be attributed to either weak recruitment of women or a deficiency of political ambition among women. Second, I hypothesize that a lack of political ambition exists among women partly because of their disproportionately high aversion to politics.

## **Methods**

I test these two hypotheses using primary data, as the information in my literature review did not provide a full picture of the reasons behind the underrepresentation of women in political office. I utilize both surveys and interviews to collect primary data. I distributed surveys to a sample of women enrolled in courses primarily at the University of Louisville. Appendix A provides a copy of the survey. I conducted phone interviews with a sample of women currently serving in the Kentucky General Assembly. Appendix B provides the questions for the interviews of the women legislators.

The target sample size for the survey respondents was 100, but I quickly surpassed that number a few days after distribution of the survey. The survey was distributed electronically to women on UofL's campus through the following outlets: email lists of all-women Greek organizations, the Honors Student Council newsletter *The Current*, the email list of the political science honors society Pi Sigma Alpha, the email list of "Women 4 Women" chapter members, and the email list of Student Government Association members. In addition, past professors of mine helped publicize my survey through word of mouth to graduate and undergraduate students in their classes. Lastly, I utilized social media through my personal Facebook page to promote the survey. Because of my use of social media to share the survey, it is possible that a very small number of women taking college courses at institutions other than UofL participated in the

survey. The sample was limited to only women enrolled in college courses by question two in my survey, which explicitly asked if the respondent was a “female student currently enrolled in college.” The sample type for the survey was purely voluntary, as no female students were required to take the survey.

My target sample size for the state legislator interviewees was four to six. I found that range a realistic expectation given that the Kentucky General Assembly commenced a long budget session in January. The sample type for the interviews was purposeful but still voluntary. I wanted to ensure representation first of both major political parties and second of diverse geographical locations. I began by contacting a state senator I know and a state representative in a leadership position. Both women are Democrats. To achieve party representativeness in my sample, I also contacted a Republican senator and a Republican representative from areas similar to those of the Democratic women. Two weeks after making initial phone calls, I was not receiving responses from most of the women. As a result, I expanded contacts to female legislators from both the Lexington and Louisville areas of Kentucky. As a Lexington native and Louisville resident, I experienced more response success from legislators from these areas. This process conflicted with my desire to maintain geographical representativeness, but I felt it necessary when weighing the risk of not reaching my target sample size.

In determining my interviewee sample, I also referred to the research of Richard Fenno (2003), who followed representatives in Congress for eight years to study their interactions with constituencies at home and published his findings in the book *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. When Fenno began his project, he said that he did not know whom to include in the sample. Instead of defining a sample, he observed whomever he could and took care to note which types of representatives were lacking throughout the process. For example, when he

recognized that he was observing too many lawyers, he added non-lawyers to the sample group. The size of Fenno's sample was also arbitrary; he decided to stop observing representatives when he thought it was time to start sharing his results (Fenno 2003). My study differs from Fenno's, as I am not performing participant observation, but his method of sampling aligns closely with mine for the interview portion of my thesis.

Although I deemed my sample sizes appropriate for both the survey and interview components of my thesis, I think that there is weakness in my sampling type. Random sampling would obviously be ideal for drawing generalizable results, but I did not find it practical for my research. First, I did not have a concrete population of college women from which to select a few by random. In order to increase the number of survey respondents, I decided to take volunteers instead. I also wanted to ensure that I was sampling women diverse in their views on women in politics. Because of my personal familiarity with groups of women who took the survey, I am confident that both politically aware and politically apathetic women participated. This point is important because of my emphasis on political ambition as a potential reason for the dearth of women in politics. Second, random sampling for my interviewees was not practical given the small number (25) of women in the Kentucky state legislature. In addition, a random sample here would have been problematic, because it could have resulted in a disproportionate representation of one party or particular geographic area. In an effort to avoid this risk, I operated with a purposeful sampling type that was again voluntary.

Between the scheduling and conducting of these phone interviews, I took care to familiarize myself with the process of elite interviewing to ensure the collection of valid and reliable information in testing my hypotheses. In elite interviewing, the interviewer is willing to let the interviewee teach him or her about the question or problem. This differs from

standardized interviewing in which the interviewer only seeks answers to a specifically delineated question or problem (Leech 2002). In addition, gaining rapport with the interviewee is especially important. Leech (2002) recommends that interviewers of elites gain rapport by appearing knowledgeable on the subject but not more knowledgeable than the interviewee, or in my case the legislator. Using phrases such as “talk with you” are also more inviting to elite interviewees than the word “interview,” so I made sure to convey a conversational style when requesting the interviews with office assistants and talking to the legislators. Finally, I utilized informal prompts like “yes” and “how interesting” to show the women I was listening over the phone (Leech 2002).

Three key concepts must be measured in order to test my hypotheses: recruitment experience, political ambition, and aversion. First, recruitment experience is measured by question seven of the survey, which asks the respondent to cite the number of times she has been approached regarding the possibility of candidacy. Additionally, the “lack of personal support” option in response to question six is illuminating in showing an absence of the political recruitment of college women. Question two of the interview question set asks the respondent to explain why she first entered politics, and responses may involve recruitment experience. Question seven of the interview also asks for the biggest obstacle standing in the way of equal gender representation in Kentucky politics, and lack of recruitment is a potential response to be cited by the interviewees.

Second, women’s political ambition serves as a critical component of my research. I define the concept by separating it into two components. First, this ambition requires an interest in politics. Second, political ambition entails a willingness to involve oneself in political activity, or more specifically in my research, running for public office. The first stage only applies to the



survey respondents, since I assume the office holding interviewees have an interest in politics. I measure political interest among the student respondents with three questions on the survey. Question six lists “lack of interest” as an option for why the respondent would not run for office. In addition, question eight allows respondents to rate their feelings toward political competition. An “indifferent” response to this question warrants a lack of interest in politics. Lastly, question ten asks to what extent the availability of resources would affect the respondent’s decision to consider running for office. Here, an “indifferent” or “unlikely” response indicates a lack of interest.

The second component of political ambition, willingness to run for office, is measured by both survey and interview questions. In the survey, question four asks if the respondent has ever considered running for office. An affirmative answer to this question indicates political ambition. Question five asks if the respondent would file to run if given the opportunity. An affirmative response here signals even stronger political ambition. Question ten also measures this second component of ambition. If a respondent answers “moderately likely” or “highly likely” to this question of whether availability of resources would increase her likelihood of filing to run for office, then political ambition is present. In the interview questions, question eight asks explicitly if the legislator has noticed an ambition gap between men and women. This question is helpful in showing whether or not women currently working in politics believe that fellow women lack political ambition. Question nine in the interview question set also serves as an integral measure of political ambition, as it asks if the legislator being interviewed ever plans to pursue higher office. Finally, question ten of the survey could also be indicative of lacking ambition if the respondent answers “unlikely” to the question of what extent her consideration of candidacy would increase if all necessary resources and support were available.

Finally, personal aversion to political contest is explicitly measured by survey question six, which lists “distaste for politics” as a response option. Question eight, however, specifically measures aversion by asking the respondent to rate her response to the competitive nature of electoral politics. Responses of “moderately averse” or “highly averse” to this question are strong indicators of aversion. The concept of aversion is not explicitly stated in the interview question set, as elected legislators are unlikely to display aversion to politics. However, an interview respondent may mention aversion in response to question seven, which asks for the biggest obstacle preventing equal gender representation in politics, or to another question in offering an open-ended response.

## **Results**

To report my results, I have separated them into two subsections: survey results and interview results. For each section, I will first offer an overview of the survey/interview results. Next, I will analyze how the data measure my central concepts of recruitment, ambition, and aversion. In addition, I identify relevant associations among those variables using the survey results. Finally, I will address my two hypotheses in light of my data from both the surveys and interviews.

### **Survey Results**

Table 1 shows a distribution of the responses submitted to my survey (Appendix A) distributed to college women primarily at the University of Louisville. Although some women skipped questions, 115 total respondents participated from January 15, 2014, to February 9, 2014. After obtaining informed consent, the women were asked to answer eight questions regarding their political interests, experiences, and attitudes. In response to question three, which

asks if the respondent thinks American voters elect enough female leaders, only six women, or 5% of respondents, answered “yes.” The vast majority of 108 women, or 95% of respondents, responded “no.” According to question four, 48 women, or 42% of respondents, had considered running for office. A larger number of 67 women, or 58% of respondents, had not considered candidacy. Of those who answered “yes” to question four, 25 women, or 22% of total respondents, answered that they would file to run if given the opportunity. A similar number of 26 women, or 23% of respondents, answered that they would not file.

Question six is illuminating in showing the reasons why those women responded that they would not file to run if given the opportunity. “Lack of interest,” “lack of money,” and “distaste for politics” were by far the most referenced reasons, eliciting responses from 52%, 41%, and 41% of respondents, respectively. Respondents also frequently referenced “lack of material campaign resources” and “lack of time” at rates of 29% and 23%. Personal reasons such as “lack of personal support” and “personal circumstances” only provoked responses from 10% and 7% of the women who responded to question six.

Question seven measures recruitment by asking the respondent to cite the number of times she has been approached by someone regarding candidacy. Not surprisingly for college students, 82 respondents, or 71%, responded with zero. Fifteen, or 13%, of the respondents responded with one. Eight respondents, or 7%, responded with two. The remaining 10 women, or 9% of respondents to this question, cited three or more occurrences.

Question eight asked the respondent to describe her response to the competitive nature of politics in the U.S. Over half of the women responded “moderately averse” (68 women or 59% of respondents). About the same numbers of women cited the remaining options of “indifferent,” “no aversion,” and “highly averse.” “Indifferent” was the second most popular response, eliciting

responses from 19 women, or 17% of respondents. “No aversion” and “highly averse” tie with 14 women, or 12% of respondents, each.

Question nine asked respondents to mark resources they had at their disposal to assist them in running. Women most frequently cited “personal support” with 67, or 84%, of the responses. The next most frequently cited resources were “an experienced mentor” and “time” with 26% (or 21 women) and 33% (or 26 women) of responses, respectively. Also not surprising when surveying college students, only 12 women, or 16%, responded that they had either “money” or “material campaign resources.” Finally, question ten asks the respondents how much more likely they would be to run if money and resources were readily available to them. A healthy 38% (43 women) responded moderately likely, but 32% (37 women) responded that they would still be unlikely to run. Only 18% (21 women) responded that they would be “highly likely” to run in that case. A combined 12% of respondents, or 14 women, responded that they were “indifferent” or “unsure.”

The methods section discussed how I planned to measure recruitment, ambition, and aversion. Those concepts are easily measured by the responses to my survey questions. First, I measure recruitment. Question six of the survey asked women to cite the number of times they have been approached about candidacy. Since a large majority of 71% responded with zero, it is clear that women in college are not, or are very rarely, recruited as political candidates. However, only 10% of respondents in question six cited “lack of personal support” as a reason for not running. This indicator is less direct in measuring recruitment, but it does show that this lack of support is not a major reason for why women do not run. Later in question nine, a large majority of the surveyed women (84%) responded that they had personal support to help them in

the event of an election. It seems, therefore, that women are rarely formally recruited, but they do have personal supporters that could be relied upon in the event one decided to run.

Second, I measure political ambition by separating it into two components: political interest and willingness to get involved. Three survey questions help to measure the first component, political interest. “Lack of interest” served as the most popular response to question six, which asked the respondent why she would choose not to run if given the chance. Over half (52%) of respondents indicated “lack of interest.” In response to question eight, only 17% of women responded that they were “indifferent” to the competitive nature of American politics. This is a much weaker indicator of lacking political interest compared to question six. Question ten also serves as a modest indicator of lacking political interest. Only 39% of women responded that they would be “indifferent” or “unlikely” to run if all necessary resources were available. For this first component of ambition, I choose to rely chiefly on question six, because it explicitly asks the respondent to cite “lack of interest” if that serves as a reason for their reluctance to run. Since over half of respondents referenced their “lack of interest,” I would argue that college women overall lack a strong interest in politics.

I also use three survey questions to test for the second component of political ambition, willingness to run for office. In response to question four, most women (58%) responded that they had not ever considered running for office, compared to 42% who answered that they had considered candidacy. Question five asks those women who responded “yes” to question four if they would file given the opportunity. This question is not as helpful in measuring ambition, since an almost equal number of women respond “yes” and “no.” It can at least be argued that very few, if any, women display strong political ambition in the form of willingness to run. If they were highly ambitious, far more women would respond “yes” than “no” to question five.

When asked to what extent their likelihood of running would increase given the availability of resources, 56% of respondents cited “moderately likely” or “highly likely.” This percentage shows that those women outnumber those who responded “not sure,” “unlikely,” or “indifferent” by 12%. In measuring political ambition with this survey data, I would argue that although few college women are seriously interested in politics, those who are interested in politics are fairly ambitious if they are offered the ready availability of resources.

Third, I measure aversion using the survey data. According to question six, 41% of respondents display aversion by offering “distaste for politics” as a reason for not running. Since 71% of respondents cite that they are “moderately averse” or “highly averse” to politics in question eight, that question is a strong indicator of aversion to politics among the women surveyed. In response to question ten, almost a third of women (32%) respond that they would be unlikely to run even if resources were readily available. These three questions clearly indicate the presence of aversion to politics among college women.

In order to determine the relationships among my three central concepts, I use the “filter” function available with the Survey Monkey service to look for associations. First, I investigate a potential association between aversion and lack of ambition. In order to do so, I filter the responses to show only those respondents who cited “distaste for politics” as a reason for not running; these women display aversion. Of those 44 women, 31 of them, or 70%, also cited “lack of interest” in response to the same question on the survey. Since 70% of those women averse to politics also display a lack of interest (the first component of ambition), association exists between aversion and lack of political ambition.

The second relationship I investigate involves recruitment and the second component of ambition, willingness to run. In order to check for association, I filter by those women who

responded that someone had approached them about political candidacy three or more times. Of those ten women, seven (70%) responded that they would be moderately likely to more strongly consider candidacy if they had money and resources available to them. This percentage is far higher than the percentage of all respondents who answered “moderately likely” in response to that question, so the women who indicated recruitment in the past were more likely to seriously consider candidacy later in the survey than those who were not recruited as frequently.

Recruitment and ambition are also associated.

The final relationship I investigate for association is again between aversion and ambition; however, this time I filter by those respondents who indicated that they were averse in some way to the competitive nature of electoral politics. Of those 82 respondents who indicated that they were “moderately averse” or “highly averse,” over half (51%) responded that they had never considered running for office, and of those who had considered it, 28% responded that they still would not run if given the opportunity compared to only 23% who responded that they would run. These numbers actually do not differ from those indicative of the whole respondent pool, so I cannot report association between aversion to political competition and willingness to run.

Now I have two hypotheses to test. First, I hypothesized that the tendency of women to avoid running for office in the first place may be attributed to either weak recruitment of women or lacking political ambition among women. In order to test this hypothesis, I checked for association by filtering for those respondents who either responded that they had never considered running or would not run if given the opportunity. Of those 87 respondents, 75% had never been approached by someone regarding potential candidacy. In addition, 62% of those women cited “lack of interest” as a reason for not running. My first hypothesis, therefore, is

confirmed. Those women who avoid running are often not recruited and/or lack interest in politics, a critical component of ambition. Second, I hypothesized that a lack of political ambition exists among women partly because of their disproportionately high aversion to politics. This hypothesis is also confirmed, as I have already shown the association between aversion and lack of ambition.

### Interview Results

For the interview portion of my thesis, I have qualitative data from four women currently serving as legislators in the Kentucky General Assembly to report. Although I contacted 13 female legislators to request an interview, only four responded to schedule a phone interview with me. My sample was able to maintain partisan representativeness, as my sample contains two Democrats and two Republicans. However, geographic representativeness is lacking despite my efforts to contact women representing different regions of Kentucky.

I will first offer an overview of how the four women answered each question in the interview question set (Appendix B). After obtaining informed consent from all four women, I began the interview by asking how they first became involved in politics. All four interviewees cited a vacated seat as a reason for getting involved in their first election. Only one interviewee responded that a change in personal circumstances allowed her to run for office for the first time. Three of the women said that they had been involved in campaigns before, so the process was not new to them. In addition, all four interviewees cited a cause they wished to pursue, a problem they were passionate about combatting, or a group they felt was underrepresented in the state's capital city of Frankfort.

In question three, I asked the respondents how they felt about the underrepresentation of women in the politics of the Commonwealth, since Kentucky ranks a low 37<sup>th</sup> nationally in the



number of women elected to the state legislature. All four women responded that they felt the underrepresentation of women was problematic. Their reasons for answering that way were also similar. All four women cited representativeness or diversity as positive assets that are lacking from a legislature that fails to proportionally represent women. Two of the women offered their enthusiasm given the unprecedented high number of women running in Kentucky in 2014 and appreciated the progress the state has made over the past ten years. One interviewee stated that more women were needed, because women are stronger consensus builders who typically do not care as much as men about getting credit for their work. One interviewee stated that more women were needed to bring up women's issues such as childcare subsidies, domestic violence, education, healthcare, and breast and ovarian cancer research and treatment. Finally, one interviewee noted that women were simply better at "getting things done."

Question four was more personal in nature, asking the legislator to elaborate on any times she was treated differently as a woman by male colleagues. One interviewee answered that the opinions of women in the legislature were often and subtly not taken as seriously as those of men, creating an environment of "keeping women in their place." One interviewee answered that she could not recall being treated differently, potentially because of a dominant personality that would not tolerate it. Two interviewees answered that it was harder for women to get leadership positions, even when they have been in the legislature longer than men against whom they are competing. Lastly, one interviewee answered that because she was a woman, she felt as though she was asked primarily about women's issues and excluded from more universal issues such as economic development.

Question five poses to the interviewees a two-part question regarding their treatment by the media. The question asks the legislators if they have ever felt that the media treated them

differently because of their gender either as a candidate or as an elected official. All four of the women initially responded “no” to both parts of this question. However, the interviewees did offer a few examples of positive and negative differential treatment worth noting. On the positive side, one interviewee said that the media “stuck up” for women. Another woman answered that being a woman allowed her more positive media treatment, since she was perceived as a fresh face. One interviewee said that she was thankful for the media, because she never felt condescended or heard people involved with the media discuss her marriage or appearance. On the negative side, one woman recalled a media representative talking about her new haircut while she was trying to talk about a policy issue. In general, the interviewees denied any unfair treatment by the media while they were candidates or working legislators.

Question six was similar to question five, but it asked the women if they ever perceived that their gender positively or negatively influenced their ability to fundraise or to mobilize volunteers. One interviewee responded that her gender helped her fundraise and mobilize volunteers; women, she said, are hard workers who are good at forming networks. One interviewee stated that women initially do not know how to ask for money like men do, but the problem subsides after a couple terms in office. One interviewee responded that women were good communicators, which made it easier for them to convince people to join the cause by volunteering or donating. Another interviewee also stated that it was not hard to raise money once elected and that voters rallied around women for their honesty and legislative work on difficult issues that are important for the Commonwealth but do not poll well with voters.

Question seven asked the women what they thought was the biggest obstacle working against equal gender representation in the Kentucky General Assembly. One woman responded that women were less likely than men to step up without being asked by a recruiter. Another

responded that party leadership worked as a gatekeeper against female candidates. Men outnumber women in leadership, and party leaders tend to seek people like them (of the same gender) to fill their seats when they retire. One interviewee responded that the problem was simply “not running.” In addition, one woman answered that women do not know how to raise money and that women are still responsible for a disproportionately high portion of family life activities and chores.

To address ambition, question eight explicitly asked the women if they had ever noticed an “ambition gap” between men and women. One woman responded in the affirmative because the numbers show that and some women still cling to traditional gender roles centered mainly in the home. Another woman responded “no,” because women simply underestimate themselves. One interviewee responded, “yes,” because more pressure is put on men to acquire leadership roles. Additionally, one interviewee responded “yes” but was initially unsure of why; she noted that women were not as comfortable with risk-taking, perhaps reducing their political ambition. Building upon the concept of ambition, question nine asked the interviewees if they planned to pursue higher political office at any point in their career. Two of the women responded “no,” simply because they are good at what they do and happy in the legislature. One woman responded “yes” to considering higher office; unlike her first election for the legislature, she would not wait to be recruited. Interestingly, one interviewee had run for higher office before but unsuccessfully. Regardless of the result of that election, she referred to it as an incredible learning experience.

As outlined in my methods, I also use qualitative data from interviews to measure recruitment, ambition, and aversion. Questions two and seven were the most likely questions in the interview set to allude to recruitment, since they inquired about how the legislator got her

start and what she thinks is the biggest obstacle working against women in the political system. In talking about why the women got involved in politics, only one interviewee said that she had been approached or recruited to run for office. Responses to that question would indicate that women are not typically recruited, so long as my sample is not made up of outliers. In response to question seven, two women responded that women simply did not run often enough. One of those women plus one additional interviewee responded that women often waited to be recruited without much luck since the male-dominated legislature typically filled empty seats with people who look like them, or more men. This qualitative data indicates low recruitment of women for involvement in Kentucky politics.

In measuring political ambition, I skip its first stage, interest in politics, for the interview portion since all the interviewees are current officeholders who clearly display an interest in politics. However, I did attempt to measure the second stage of ambition, willingness to run, using the interview data. Question eight in the question set asks the women if they notice an “ambition gap” between men and women, directly measuring female political ambition as they understand it. One interviewee responded that there was not a gap; instead, women simply underestimated themselves. However, three women responded, “yes,” either because the numbers show a gap or because women tend to avoid risk and the pressure to run more often than men. Question nine indirectly measured ambition by asking the women whether they had ever considered running for higher office. One interviewee responded “no,” out of contentment for her current position. Another expressed the same contentment but did not rule out running for a higher position if the opportunity arose. Out of the final two interviewees, one had run for higher office before without success, and the other would consider higher office given her experience gained thus far in office at the state level. Responses to question eight seem to

indicate an understanding of lower female political ambition among the women, yet question nine revealed that the majority of them were open-minded toward the prospect of higher office. It is clear, however, that the women interviewed sensed lower political ambition among women in general, though they might display a strong sense of ambition themselves.

Finally, I attempt to utilize the qualitative data to measure aversion. Aversion is not explicitly addressed in the interview question set, but I sorted through the data to find any potential mentions of aversion or similar concepts. None of the four interviewees mentioned female aversion to politics. They did make statements, however, that might relate to aversion. Two interviewees argued that politics still presented an “uphill battle” for women in Kentucky; it is possible, therefore, that women avoid the process because they view it as male-dominated and anticipate the difficulties they would face in office. Similarly, another legislator mentioned that the state legislature could be viewed as a “good ole boy” network, a perception that could lead to female aversion to politics in Kentucky. Finally, a legislator said that women fail to “step up” as often as men; this reality could be the result of female aversion to politics, although I do not have an interviewee who explicitly stated that relationship. Aversion, therefore, is difficult to measure with my qualitative data, since the question set did not specifically provoke the concept.

In finalizing my analysis of the qualitative data, I must address my two hypotheses. First, I hypothesized that women avoided running for office because of either lack of recruitment or diminished ambition. My measurements of recruitment and ambition (in the form of running for office) discussed above would support this hypothesis. The interviewees indicated a lack of recruitment of female candidates in Kentucky, and more than half of the legislators sensed an “ambition gap” between men and women with regard to public leadership. Although my data certainly do not prove causation, lacking recruitment and diminished ambition are verifiably

present in my data. Second, I hypothesized that diminished female political ambition was due in part to the female tendency to avoid politics, or aversion. Given the failure of the interview data to conclusively measure aversion, this hypothesis cannot be supported by the qualitative interview data.

### Summary

When survey and interview data are combined, my first hypothesis stating that women do not run either because of lack of recruitment or diminished political ambition holds. However, the combined data fail to support my second hypothesis stating that lacking ambition is a result of female aversion to the political process. The inability of the interviews to measure aversion precludes the qualitative data from supporting the second hypothesis despite the support offered for the hypothesis by the quantitative survey data. Furthermore, it should be noted that neither the quantitative survey nor qualitative interview data could prove causation. Instead, associations serve as the strongest possible tools in my study to evaluate my hypotheses, and in turn, to answer my central research question of why so few women run for office.

### **Conclusion**

I developed this study with one main goal – to find answers to the question of why more women do not run for political office in Kentucky. Relying on my suspicion that political attitudes are formed early in women, I decided to survey women currently enrolled in college to gain a more clear idea of how young women view politics and their potential involvement as a candidate. When I discovered that over half of the women surveyed responded that they had never considered candidacy, I was not surprised given American National Election Survey data showing female skepticism that their involvement can actually make a difference in the

complicated political world. In addition to surveying young women, most of whom are getting their careers started, I found it necessary to involve women who have experienced elections firsthand as candidates. Furthermore, I sought to investigate how they might have been treated differently because of their gender while serving in elected office. Survey and interview data, therefore, combine to answer my research question of why more women do not run for office.

To answer my research question, I decided to test two hypotheses developed on the basis of previous literature and research. First, I hypothesized that women do not run either because they are not recruited or they lack political ambition at the levels that men possess. To narrow in on that hypothesis, I further hypothesized that women lacked political ambition partly because of their high aversion to politics. Survey and interview showed similar results to help determine the validity of each hypothesis; however, mild differences between the two data sets did arise.

Survey data showing that young women are rarely, if ever, recruited to run for office and that women frequently express a lack of interest in politics confirms hypothesis number one. Because I identified association between ambition and aversion indicators in the survey data, the survey also confirms hypothesis number two. In analyzing the interview data with respect to the hypotheses, I must work qualitatively. Only one of the four interviewees reported recruitment as a reason for getting involved in politics, so diminished female recruitment is evident. In addition, more than half of the interviewees stated that women did indeed lack political ambition compared to men. The interview data, therefore, also confirm hypothesis number one.

Hypothesis number two, however, cannot be confirmed because of the question set's inability to measure aversion. All interviewees were elected office-holders, so aversion is not a concept they would be likely to display in talking about their personal experiences.

After completing my study, I have realized a few pieces that could have been planned or handled differently. I would like to have interviewed the female legislators in person; however, my schedule did not allow it. A day at the capitol may have produced more than four agreements to my interview request. I also would have integrated additional questions to gain the interviewees' insight on the concept of aversion. Although they were not turned off by politics, it would have been interesting to hear their perspective on whether or not other women in their lives displayed such aversion. Inclusion of this question would have also enabled me to fully test my second hypothesis. Finally, it would not have been difficult also to survey men on UofL's campus. Male answers to the question of whether one has ever considered running for office would have made the contrast between men and women even more clear; instead, I kept male characteristics largely out of the scope of my study.

Two main limitations inhibit my study. First, I was not able to maintain geographic representativeness of the female legislators. In the end, my sample of interviewees was fully voluntary but purposeful in nature. Although I was able to capture party representativeness, data from interviewees across different regions of the state may have differed in some way based on diverse political cultures that inhabit even the regions of Kentucky. Second, my study does not involve the capacity to prove or disprove causation among variables, for instance, aversion causing a lack of ambition. Associations are the strongest relationships I have at my disposal to address my research question and hypotheses.

Despite the vast body of literature on the topic, there remains much to be explored by future scholars. First, it would be helpful to study further the concept of state political culture to identify whether or not states with cultures more conducive to female candidates actually produce policies more favorable to women. Second, I would find it beneficial to study girls in



their early middle school years or whenever they first witness a political contest such as the election of officers in a school organization or student government. It is clear from my research that most college women already hold steadfast attitudes toward the political process, so it would be beneficial to identify how and when those attitudes are formed. Third, ambition should also be studied at a younger age. For example, a study could be performed to identify the numbers of middle school and high school women who demonstrate a desire for career life or public leadership versus those who look forward to marriage or motherhood. Such information would be invaluable to the question of why more women do not run. Research into institutional factors extending from family, school, media, entertainment, and advertising is also necessary to delve deeper into the question of how gender stereotypes that potentially diminish female ambition are perpetuated. Although my study narrowed in on the topic of women in politics, reasons for why women are underrepresented involve a multitude of other disciplines, institutions, and societal norms. The question of why our political system severely lacks women, therefore, is not one that needs to be contained to political science.

## Appendix A

### 1. Dear Participant:

You are being invited to participate in a research study by answering the attached survey about political ambition in women. There are no known risks for your participation in this research study. The information collected may not benefit you directly. The information learned in this study may be helpful to others. The information you provide will be used for a senior honors thesis project seeking to understand the reasons behind the large gender deficit in politics. The survey will take approximately 2 minutes time to complete.

Individuals from the Department of Political Science, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the Human Subjects Protection Program Office (HSPPO), and other regulatory agencies may inspect these records. In all other respects, however, the data will be held in confidence to the extent permitted by law. Should the data be published, your identity will not be disclosed.

Taking part in this study is voluntary. By completing this survey you agree to take part in this research study. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to be in this study you may stop taking part at any time. If you decide not to be in this study or if you stop taking part at any time, you will not lose any benefits for which you may qualify.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research study, please contact: Carrie Mattingly at [Carrie.Mattingly@louisville.edu](mailto:Carrie.Mattingly@louisville.edu).

If you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may call the Human Subjects Protection Program Office at (502) 852-5188. You can discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject, in private, with a member of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). You may also call this number if you have other questions about the research, and you cannot reach the research staff, or want to talk to someone else. The IRB is an independent committee made up of people from the University community, staff of the institutions, as well as people from the community not connected with these institutions. The IRB has reviewed this research study.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research or research staff and you do not wish to give your name, you may call 1-877-852-1167. This is a 24 hour hot line answered by people who do not work at the University of Louisville.

Sincerely,

Carrie Mattingly  
Dr. Laurie Rhodebeck (Faculty Supervisor)

By answering "yes" below you are giving your consent to participate in the above study.

Do you consent to participate in this survey?

Yes

No

2. Are you a female student currently enrolled in college?

Yes

No

3. Do you think the American political system has enough elected female leaders?

Yes

No

4. Have you personally ever considered running for public office?

Yes

No

5. If yes, would you file to run if given the opportunity?

Yes

No

I answered "No" to question 4.

6. If you would not file to run, why not? Choose all that apply.

Lack of Interest

Lack of Personal Support - e.g. Friends, Family Members

Lack of Money

Lack of Material Campaign Resources - e.g. Office Space, Manpower, or PR/Advertising

Lack of Time

Distaste for Politics

Personal Circumstances - e.g. Family/Children, Health

I answered "Yes" to question 5.

Other (please specify)

7. Cite the number of times you have been approached by a person or organization regarding the possibility of political candidacy.

0

1

2

3

4

5+

8. How would you describe your personal response to the competitive nature of American electoral politics?

Indifferent

No Aversion

Moderately Averse

Highly Averse

9. Which resources do you have at your disposal to assist you in running for office? Choose all that apply.

Money

Material Campaign Resources

An Experienced Mentor

Personal Support

Time

Other (please specify)

10. To what extent would the likelihood of your consideration of or filing for political candidacy increase if resources and mentors were readily available at your convenience?

Indifferent

Unlikely

Moderately Likely

Highly Likely

Not Sure

## Appendix B

1. Distributed informed consent statement to interviewees via email prior to interview.
2. When did you first decide to enter politics? Did you have a particular reason for doing so?
3. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers, Kentucky ranks 37<sup>th</sup> nationally in the representation of women in state legislatures. Do you think this underrepresentation of women in the Commonwealth is problematic?

Why or why not?

4. As a woman involved in politics, have you ever received differential treatment from colleagues?

Could you please elaborate?

5. I'd like to ask you two questions about your treatment by the media.

First, when you were a candidate for the state legislature, did you ever feel that the media treated you differently because of your gender?

Could you please elaborate?

Second, now that you've become a state legislator, do you ever feel that the media treat you differently because of your gender?

Could you please elaborate?

6. Have you ever felt that your gender has positively or negatively affected your ability to fundraise and/or mobilize volunteers?

Could you please elaborate?

7. What do you think is the biggest obstacle working against equal gender representation in Kentucky politics?

8. Have you ever noticed an “ambition gap” between men and women? For example, do you feel that one gender displays a greater desire for leadership than another?

9. Do you plan to pursue higher political offices at any point in your career?

Why or why not?

10. What advice would you give young women who would like to enter politics one day but fear unequal treatment because of their gender?

**Table 1: Distribution of Responses to Survey of College Women**

		(N answering)
American political system has elected enough female leaders (% answering 'yes')	5%	114
Have personally considered running for public office (% answering 'yes')	42%	115
Would file to run if given the opportunity (% answering 'yes')	22%	112
Reasons not to file to run:		107
Lack of interest	52%	
Lack of personal support	10%	
Lack of money	41%	
Lack of material campaign resources	29%	
Lack of time	23%	
Distaste for politics	41%	
Personal circumstances	7%	
Number of times approached about political candidacy:		115
0	71%	
1	13%	
2	7%	
3+	9%	
Response to competitive nature of American electoral politics:		115
Indifferent	17%	
No aversion	12%	
Moderately averse	59%	
Highly averse	12%	
Resources available to assist a run for office:		80
Money	8%	
Material campaign resources	8%	
Experienced mentor	26%	
Personal support	84%	
Time	33%	
If resources/mentors were available your likelihood of filing for candidacy would be:		115
Indifferent	7%	
Unlikely	32%	
Moderately likely	38%	
Highly likely	18%	
Not sure	5%	

Source: "Women and Kentucky Politics" survey created by Carrie Mattingly using the online service Survey Monkey. The survey was distributed online to women enrolled in courses at the college level from January 15, 2014, to February 9, 2014. 115 women completed the survey.

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